



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY - 5 2009

The Honorable Barney Frank
U.S. House of Representatives
2252 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Frank:

Thank you for your letter of March 18, 2009, cosigned by your colleagues regarding continued protection of inventoried roadless areas in our national forests while legal challenges over their status are being resolved. The Department of Agriculture continues to support protection of these lands and keeping wild places wild.

Roadless areas preserve essential watersheds and help ensure an abundant supply of clean drinking water. These large areas of undisturbed forests provide diverse habitats for sensitive and endangered wildlife. In addition, roadless areas provide other critical ecological services, such as carbon storage, and operate as effective barriers to invasive species, while also providing social values such as scenic landscapes and a host of recreational opportunities.

I appreciate your advice and recommendations that I direct the Forest Service to not propose or implement any projects that would be inconsistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule until such time as the legal challenges over their status are resolved. I will be meeting with my staff in the Natural Resources and Environment mission area to discuss the issue, status and options in the future; meanwhile, I have full confidence in the leadership of the Forest Service as they continue to conserve and protect these vitally important lands and meet all legal obligations. Once our team is fully assembled, we look forward to a dialogue on how best to protect these national treasures.

Again, thank you for your letter. A similar letter has been sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack", written in a cursive style.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary